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The Communication Museum in Lisbon: contribution of its early collections to the history of telecommunications in nineteenth-century Portugal

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Throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, important innovation experiences in telecommunications were presented at World Exhibitions in Europe. The circulation of knowledge, artefacts, ideas and professionals through technical publications and journals, travellers and specialised meetings and congresses facilitated increasingly widespread dissemination about these developments from country to country. Moreover, this circulation promoted the creation of several museums of science and technology. In Portugal, one of the earliest such museums is the Communication Museum, created in 1877 (Museu Postal), under the postal governmental authority (Direcção Geral dos Correios). The Museum still exists today and its disciplinary scope has been enlarged. However, when it was created technological development was already significant and it aimed at preserving the memory of telecommunications through artefacts and documentation associated with Portuguese experts in the field. This paper presents an ongoing research into the Museum's early collection, particularly telegraphs and telephones, in order to understand its contribution to the history of telecommunications in Portugal and Europe. The methodology is material culture-oriented. Discussion will focus on artefacts that considerably materialise European networks and innovation transfer, namely the telegraphs and telephones signed by Cristiano Augusto Bramão (1840-1881) and Maximiliano Augusto Herrmann (1838-1913), both displayed in World Exhibitions.